



We are seeking not merely to know what is good, but to become good.
— Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*



Ethics 2050

The Good Life: Ethics and
Contemporary Moral Problems

Foundation Question

How should I live?

Ethics 2050 is one of a group of five courses that we call the foundation courses. The courses make a Villanova education distinctive and work together to answer a series of related questions:

WHO AM I?

Augustine and Culture Seminar 1000 (Ancients) and 1001 (Moderns)

WHAT CAN I KNOW?

Philosophy 1000:
Knowledge, Reality, Self

WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Theology and
Religious Studies 1000:
Faith, Reason, and Culture

HOW SHOULD I LIVE?

Ethics 2050:
The Good Life—
Ethics and Contemporary
Moral Problems

By seeking answers to these questions, you will conduct an interdisciplinary inquiry that is informed by Augustinian and Catholic intellectual traditions, develop your skills in critical thinking and communication, deepen your understanding of yourself and the world, and engage with issues of personal responsibility and social justice.

Instructor: Rachel Aumiller

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ETH 2050.002: M/W/F 8:30-9:20, WHITE 116

ETH 2050.004: M/W/F 9:30-10:20, WHITE 116

Office Hours: M/W/F 11:00-12:00, Falvey Café
or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Section One, Ancient Virtue. The first half of this course considers the philosophical and theological foundation of many values that are traditionally upheld as the core values of Catholic Ethics. As a Villanova student many of these virtues will be familiar to you (faith, hope, and love). Our goal will be to recover something fresh in these all too familiar ethical concepts by looking at them within antiquity. We will also touch upon some early Christian virtues that are less frequently considered, such as *Apatheia*, the quality of inner stillness or detachment. We will begin our inquiry with the Greeks who saw Ethics as belonging to public life (*the polis*). We will then turn to early Christian thinkers, like Evagrius and Augustine, who saw ethics as a personal struggle of *interiority*. We will conclude this section by considering the cultivation of virtue as both an incredibly private event but also an event that must be publically actualized within our communities.

Section Two, Unorthodox Virtue The focus of the second half of this course will be primarily on 20th and 21st century philosophical and theological texts. These accounts of “the good life” will embrace values that are perhaps unexpected as ethical ideals: vulnerability, laughter, anger, despair, and dissatisfaction. At first glance these concepts may seem opposed to traditional Catholic ethics. We will consider ways in which they challenge the virtues discussed in our first section. However, we will also allow these “new” virtues to challenged some of our original assumptions about traditional Catholic virtue. Our goal will be to arrive at deeper and more complex definition of the virtues discussed in section one by applying both sets of virtues—the old and new—to contemporary ethical issues that we encounter in our everyday life. Are these two sets of ethical values truly opposed or are there ways the first set also encompasses the latter? This half of the course will be driven by class debates concerning ethical issues that have direct relevance to your experience: the fight for gender and race equality, issues of censorship and safe speech within the University, problems with contemporary ways of accessing health and wellness (the good life).

Guiding Questions. Nietzsche claims that so great is joy that it thirsts for woe. Can the same be said of the core virtues of Catholic Ethics? So powerful is love that it demands righteous anger? So strong is hope that it does not shy away from despair? How does the virtue of detachment or stillness enhance unity and love in our communities? What is the role of courage in the act of making ourselves vulnerable to the suffering of others? How is righteous anger in the face of injustice an expression of love? Has traditional theological and philosophical thought been too quick to mark certain emotions, such as laughter, as socially divisive? Can these “divisive” disposition also offer communal unity? Are there ways that our faith, hope and love can be strengthened by the experience of despair?

COURSE GOALS

1. To provide students an opportunity to examine the normative claims to which they have been introduced in other elements of the core curriculum.
2. To advance understanding and critical reflection on Christian and especially Roman Catholic, Augustinian accounts of a distinctive and viable vision of human flourishing that challenges and is challenged by alternative visions of the moral life in fundamental respects.
3. To explore the significance of those different approaches to the moral life through the examination of various contemporary moral questions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Content

1. The ability to articulate the basic tensions between Christian approaches to the moral life and other alternative accounts, particularly as manifested in the following areas: the social dimension of human existence, the individual good vs. the common good, moral relativism vs. objective moral claims, and questions of justice.
2. An ability to trace at least some of these tensions with respect to some particular contemporary moral relation.

Skills

1. The ability to read texts carefully and critically, so as to advance the conversation about the moral life with one’s peers.
2. A capacity to engage in practical reasoning to arrive at reasoned judgment about some aspect of contemporary moral relations.

READINGS

We will read short excerpts from some of the following texts. I will provide these texts for you on B.B.

Plato, Republic, Book IV
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I
Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure* *

Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* *
Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIV; Book XIX
Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Natural Law

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Martin Luther, *Discourse on the Free Will*
Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

Marx, "On Prussian Censorship"
Zupancic, "Love as Comedy" from *The Odd One In*.
Anca Parvulescu, "The Community of Laughters" from *Laughter*

Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger" from *Sister Outsider*
Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Works of Love" Making the Connections in Feminist Social Ethics

Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* and *Ethics and Infinity*
Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*
Butler, *The Precarious Life*, "Precarious Life"

GRADE ASSIGNMENTS

25% Attendance, Preparation, Presentations and Participation
25% First Paper
25% Second Paper
25% Final Paper/Presentation

Grading Scale: A 100-94 / A- 93-90 / B+ 89-87 / B 86-83 / B- 82-80 / C+ 79-77 / C 76-73 / C- 72-70 / D+ 69-67 / D 66-63 / D- 62-60 / F below 60

Attendance, Preparation, Presentations and Participation

Your physical presence is not enough to achieve full credit for attendance, which will count for 25% of your overall grade for this course. You will also be evaluated on how well you prepare for class and your participation in class. Being a good participant in class entails being an attentive listener to the professor and your classmates, responding to others in a thoughtful and respectful manner, and having the courage to offer your own ideas to our class discussions. Always come to class with the appropriate texts and materials.

Most of your reading assignments will not be long but will nevertheless be challenging in content. In order to have a sophisticated grasp of these texts, you will need to read them slowly and carefully re-read them. Look up words or ideas with which you are not familiar, highlight key passages or points and take detailed notes. I will help you prepare for class by giving you questions that will guide your reading and prepare you for class discussion. You are expected to give thoughtful answers to these questions.

Short Papers and Final Presentation

We will devote several days of class to discussing how to write your two papers and how to prepare for your final presentation. You will be required to take a rough draft of each of your papers to the Writing Center: This is an excellence resource Villanova has for you to get assistance on your written work, and there are even Philosophy graduate students there to assist you that you can request specifically. <http://www.writingcenter.villanova.edu>

OTHER POLICIES

- Statement on Disabilities: Villanova seeks to make reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability, please contact me outside of class, and make arrangements to register with the Learning Support Office by calling 610/519- 5176 or sending an e-mail to learning.support.services@villanova.edu. For physical access or temporary disabling conditions, please contact the Office of Disability Services at Stephen.mcwilliams@villanova.edu. Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.
- Technology: Generally speaking, you may not use laptops, phones, or other electronic devices during class sessions.
- Statement on Academic Integrity: This course will enforce strictest standards of academic integrity. All papers must have scrupulous documentation of any sources you use, following the MLA format. You also are expected to follow any other rules given by the instructor regarding acceptable and unacceptable collaboration on any given assignment. Plagiarism and all forms of cheating will be strictly prosecuted. Students who plagiarize according to the University definition of plagiarism will receive an “F” for the assignment, and, depending on the severity of the infractions, and “F” for the course. Again, please ask for clarification if you are the least bit unsure. When doing tests and quizzes, be sure you do not attempt to give or receive unauthorized information. For the College’s statement on Academic Integrity, you should consult the *Enchiridion*. You may view the university’s Academic Integrity Policy and Code, as well as other useful information related to writing papers, at the Academic Integrity Gateway web site: <http://library.villanova.edu/Help/AcademicIntegrity>
- Please keep copies of all of the work you submit throughout the semester. Also, check on BlackBoard for your grades.
- Grade Questions: Villanova grading policies can be found at: <http://www.villanova.edu/enroll/registrar/grades/policy/defined.htm>. If you have concerns about a grade, please resubmit your work to me, with a written explanation of your concern or question. I will reread your work and return it to you with written comments. If a grade change is warranted, I will also change your grade. Under no circumstances will your grade be lowered as a result of this process. If you still have concerns or questions, please make an appointment to meet with me in person to discuss the work. Do not discuss the work with me until after you have resubmitted it and it has been returned to you.
- Late Work: Late papers and assignments will be docked a full letter grade for the first late day, and a fraction of a grade (say from C to C-) for each subsequent day. However, if you know in advance that you will need an extension, please contact me as soon as possible to see what can be done.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. ANCIENT VIRTUE

W1. The Good

8.24 (W): Intro

8.26 (F): Scattergories: debating virtue, pleasure, happiness

W2. The Ethics of Pleasure

8.29 (M): Ethics and Pleasure

8.31 (W): Two Paradigms of Pleasure

9.2 (F): Plato

W3. The Ethics of Pleasure

9.5 (M): Labor Day

9.7 (W): Aristotle

9.9 (F): Debate

W4. Apatheia

9.12 (M): Evagrius

9.14 (W): Evagrius

9.16 (F): Evagrius, discuss first paper

W5. week off

9.14 (M):

9.21 (W):

9.23 (F):

W6. Caritas

9.26 (M): Paper Workshop, draft due

9.28 (W): Augustine

9.30 (F): Augustine

W7. Temperantia, Fortitudo, Prudentia, Iustitia

10.3. (M): Aquinas

10.5 (W): Aquinas

10.7 (F): Aquinas FIRST PAPER DUE

[MIDTERM BREAK]

II. UNORTHODOX VIRTUES

W8. Questioning Virtue

Some issues for debate: Should an ethical value be universal? When is right to reject the ethical standard of one's religious, political or social community?

10.17 (M): Introduction to Section II

10.19 (W): Nietzsche, Beatitudes

10.21 (F): Nietzsche

W9. Dissatisfaction & Despair

Some issues for debate: the contemporary imperative to achieve personal happiness; how do we access psychological health; who is responsible for an individual's well being? Self or society?

10.24 (M): Aaron Schuster

10.26 (W): Martin Luther

10.28 (F): Simone Weil

W10. Anger

Some issues for debate: questioning gender and racial inequality. How do we open up a space for new voices in our conversations that define ethical norms? How to act ethically in the face of injustice? Can one act unethically for the sake of ethics? The role of violence and anger in activism.

10.31 (M): Audre Lorde

11.2 (W): Audre Lorde

11.4 (F): Beverly Wildung Harrison

W11. Humor

Some issues for debate: Is moderation always ideal? Questions of censorship, safe spaces, and speaking out.

11.7 (M): Marx

11.9(W): Zupancic

11.11 (F): Parulescu

W12. Vulnerability

Some issues for debate: issues of security and threats. Does more security make us more secure? How can assuring my own safety and comfort be an ethical violation of others? Whose happiness am I responsible for? Who is my ethical community?

11.14 (M): Paper Workshop, **draft due**

11.16 (W): Butler

11.18 (F): Butler

W13. Prep for Final

11.21 (M): Discussing Final Assignment, **SECOND PAPER DUE**

11.23 (W): THANKSGIVING RECESS

11.25 (F): THANKSGIVING RECESS

W14: Final Presentations and Debates

Identifying your own unorthodox virtue. How does your new virtue relate to one of the virtues discussed in Section One? Illustrate the value of your new virtue by applying it to a contemporary issue not discussed in class.

11.28 (M): workshop

11.30 (W): final presentations

12.2 (F): final presentation

W15. Final Presentations and Debates

12.5 (M): Final Presentations

12.7 (W): Final Presentations

12.9 (F) : Final Presentations

W16. Final Class

12.12 (M): Closing Remarks

FINAL EXAM DUE:

ETH 2050.002: 12.16, 8:30-11

ETH 2050.004: 12.17, 8:00-10:30

